



ALL OUR KIN INC.

A SAFE AND LOVING PLACE WHERE PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN LEARN

**Testimony in Support of SB 1044**

**Christina Nelson, Early Childhood Policy Fellow, All Our Kin**

**Before the Human Services Committee**

**March 12, 2015**

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Christina Nelson, and I am a Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. We are a nationally-recognized, Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains and supports family child care providers. I'm here today to testify in support of SB 1044, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOUPMENT OF STATE COSTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LOW WAGE EMPLOYERS, as a way to improve wages for early childhood educators, including family child care providers, by using fees collected from large employers.

Too many parents find themselves working hard at full-time jobs yet still being unable to provide for themselves or their families. Even with the support of government programs, they struggle to maintain a decent quality of life. Moreover, when their children grow up in poverty, they are denied the experiences and resources that will allow them to succeed in school and later on. Low wages contribute to family environments of stress and instability and obstruct parents' ability to ensure their children's physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

This situation is unacceptable. SB 1044 aims to remedy the problem by compelling large low-wage employers to pay a fee, allowing the state to recoup some of these costs and channel funds toward programs oriented around reducing poverty, especially child poverty. The funds that the proposal would generate for the Departments of Social Services and Developmental Services and the Office of Early Childhood represent a significant step forward, particularly considering that this year's budget threatens to push our state backward.

All Our Kin would like to especially emphasize the impact that SB 1044 would have for the Office of Early Childhood's effort to increase access to, support, and improve the quality of child care and early learning opportunities for the children of low wage workers. A wealth of research indicates that investments in the very first years of a child's life – when the brain is growing rapidly and a child's environment has the greatest impact on development – have huge payoffs later on. Most notably, Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has shown that investments in early childhood education can have dramatic impacts on economic, health, and social outcomes for individuals and society<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Connecticut's achievement gap is the largest of all 50 states. This inequality must be one of the legislature's top priorities, and early childhood is the place to start. All children deserve opportunities to learn and thrive in their earliest years, and committing more funding to early care and education is a

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<sup>1</sup> Heckman, J. "Invest In Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy." Chicago, IL: The Heckman Equation. Accessed at <http://www.heckmanequation.org/content/resource/invest-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-economy>

proactive approach to improving our state's future. Now is the time to put our dollars where they will make the biggest difference.

The single most important predictor of the quality of care children receive is child care staff wages,<sup>2</sup> but at All Our Kin, we see firsthand how child care providers – especially family child care providers – are undervalued and undercompensated, despite the fact that they are entrusted with preparing our future leaders and thinkers for school and life. Thus, a key component of improving our state's early learning opportunities is increasing the wages of early educators, who, because of inadequate compensation in the field of early childhood, suffer the same economic stressors as the low-wage families they serve. Recent research from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, documents the high rates of utilization of public programs to augment low child care earnings: almost half (46%) of U.S. center-based child care workers reside in families enrolled in at least one public support programs.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence to suggest that family child care providers are even less likely than center-based providers to earn a livable wage.<sup>4</sup> The negative impacts of these low wages trickle down to providers' own children as well. Despite these circumstances, the family child care providers that All Our Kin works with are incredibly dedicated to improving their programs and providing high quality care. However, they deserve more. The state must increase funding for provider wages in order to improve quality for the children of low-wage workers and give early educators the compensation and recognition that their work warrants.

If passed, SB 1044 would have a triple impact: it would incentivize large employers to raise the wages that they offer to their employees; it would lift the wages of early educators, thus leading to an increase in quality; and it would improve early care and education programs to give young children the high-quality early learning experiences they need and deserve.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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<sup>2</sup> Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & D. Phillips. 1990. *Who Cares? Child Care Teachers and the Quality of Care In America, Executive Summary*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, UC Berkeley. Accessed at <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Who-Cares-executive-summary.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & C. Howes. 2014. *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, UC Berkeley. Accessed at <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ReportFINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Kagen, S., Tarrant, K., Carson, A., Kauerz, K. 2006. *The Early Care and Education Teaching Workforce: At the Fulcrum*. Houston, TX: Cornerstones for Kids. Accessed at [http://www.cpsr.us/workforceplanning/documents/06.12\\_teachers\\_report.pdf](http://www.cpsr.us/workforceplanning/documents/06.12_teachers_report.pdf)